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Science

House Votes To Authorize \$2 Billion-Plus For Nanotechnology

by [Maureen Sirhal](#)

House lawmakers on Wednesday overwhelmingly passed legislation that would authorize \$2.36 billion to promote research in the emerging discipline known as nanotechnology, which proponents say will fuel economic growth. The vote was 405-19.

New York Republican **Sherwood Boehlert**, chairman of the House Science Committee, and California Democrat **Mike Honda** sponsored the measure, [H.R. 766](#), which would earmark \$645 million in fiscal 2004 for the National Science Foundation, the Energy Department, the National Institute of Standards and Technology and 10 other agencies to support nanotech programs. That funding level would increase to \$709.5 million in fiscal 2005 and \$781 million in fiscal 2006.

Nanotechnology could be a key to growth in areas such as medicine, manufacturing and information technology, Boehlert said, and the federal government should support the basic research to make that future possible.

Nanotechnology involves the manipulation of molecules at the atomic level. High-tech firms such as Intel and Hewlett-Packard are investing millions of dollars in nanotech research to revolutionize tech products, and experts estimate that the research could create a \$1 trillion industry within 10 years.

The bill also would establish a nanotech advisory committee and coordination office, and create incentives designed to encourage Americans to pursue engineering and science degrees.

The House defeated Democratic amendments designed to increase oversight of, public participation in and funding for research on the societal and ethical implications of nanotechnology. Boehlert and **Ralph Hall** of Texas, the ranking Democrat on the Science Committee, said the bill would authorize adequate funding for such research.

Rep. **Eddie Bernice Johnson**, D-Texas, pressed for language to establish a citizens' advisory committee for airing public concerns about nanotech initiatives. Bill proponents agreed to a "watered down" version of Johnson's proposal.

Fellow Texas Democrat **Sheila Jackson Lee** called for the creation of a center to study the

ethical, educational, environmental, legal and workforce-related issues associated with nanotechnology. Boehlert said the bill calls for the integrated study of those matters, and lawmakers agreed to delay debate over Lee's amendment until the Senate passes a similar nanotech bill and negotiators for the two chambers meet to craft a compromise.

Lawmakers also defeated two amendments by Texas Democrat **Chris Bell** -- one to direct some of the research funding toward studying the environmental side effects of nanotechnology and the other concerning energy-related nanotech funding.

Scott Cooper, manager for technology policy at Hewlett-Packard, said the bill would help create "the building blocks of the nanotechnology field through ... basic research" and thus spur a new marketplace.